

FARM: The health benefits of carrots

By Mary Welch-Bezemek, Special to this Newspaper | Posted: Thursday, February 4, 2016 12:10 am

This week in the fruit and vegetable series we will look at carrots. The carrot is a root vegetable that is often claimed to be the perfect health food. It's easy to pack for a quick snack, great in stews and soups and of course in a variety of salads. It is crunchy, tasty and highly nutritious.

Carrots come in different varieties. They're not just orange anymore — look for golden, white, purple and red at farmers markets and specialty grocery stores. Carrots are second only to beets in sugar content for vegetables. A good rule of thumb is the darker the color the sweeter the flavor.

Carrots have a number of health benefits. They are a weight loss friendly food and have been linked to lower cholesterol levels and improved eye health. The carotene antioxidants in them have also been linked to reduced risk of cancer. Carrots contain very little fat and protein. One medium, raw carrot contains 25 calories, with only 4 grams of digestible carbs and 2 grams of fiber. Carrots often rank low on the glycemic index, which is a measure of how quickly foods raise blood sugar after a meal.

Eating low-glycemic foods is linked to numerous health benefits and is considered particularly beneficial for people with diabetes. Carrots are a good source of several vitamins and minerals, especially vitamin A (from beta-carotene), biotin, vitamin K, potassium and vitamin B6.

Vitamin A promotes good vision and is important for growth, development and immune function. Biotin, which is one of the B-vitamins plays an important role in fat and protein metabolism. Vitamin K is important for blood coagulation and can promote bone health. Potassium is an



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essential mineral, important for blood pressure control and Vitamin B6 is a group of vitamins that are involved with the conversion of food into energy.

When shopping for this food in the grocery store you will find regular size carrots and baby carrots. Baby carrot is a term for small and/or immature carrots which are very popular for snacks. The nutritional benefit of carrots is the same between regular and baby carrots. Carrots are versatile, extremely nutritious and tasty vegetables.

They are also so commonly available we are likely to take them for granted. If you are used to orange sticks — big or small — from the grocery store, a farm-fresh carrot may well be a revelation to you. They are sweet and tender, full of flavor and crunch. Carrots are great scrubbed clean and eaten raw or prepared cooked as a side vegetable or in many of your favorite dishes. The carrot peel is a great source of fiber and does not need to be removed before eating. The next time you are in the supermarket, pick up a bag of carrots and enjoy this tasty food which is a great addition to a healthy diet.